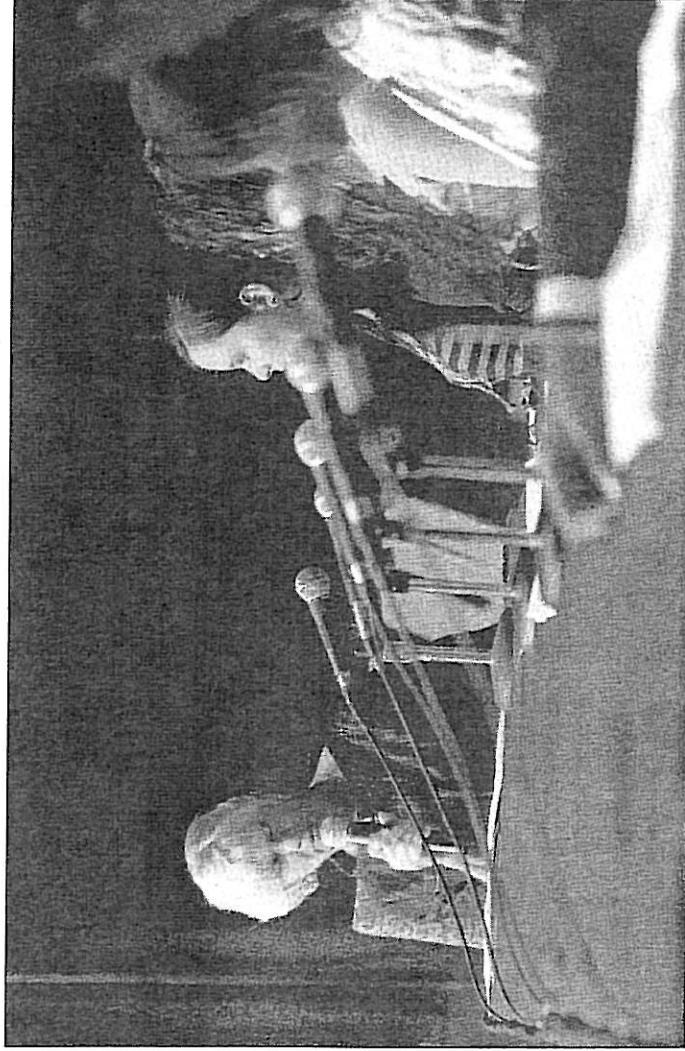


## KEEPING KIDS IN SCHOOL



First lady Jane Beshear was host of a student panel at a gathering on reducing the number of dropouts.

Photos by Aaron Borton, Special to The Courier-Journal

# Summit targets dropout problem

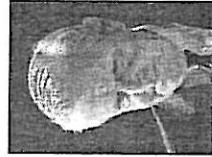
## Ideas offered to help students succeed

By **Antoinette Konz**  
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FRANKFORT, Ky. — Facing a crowd of about 400 people, Jessica Burgess spoke Saturday about how she dropped out of high school at 16 — and why she went back and earned her diploma.

"It was my last chance and I wanted to do it for my daughter," Burgess, 22, of Nicholasville, told an audience gathered from around the state at a summit aimed at reducing the number of Kentucky high school dropouts. "How was I going to tell my daughter that I wanted her to get her high school degree when I didn't have one myself?"

Burgess was one of five students who participated in a student panel with Kentucky first lady Jane Beshear during the summit, called Graduate Kentucky: A Community Approach. The event, for which the first lady and Kentucky Education Secretary Helen Mountjoy were



Terry Holliday, Kentucky's new education commissioner, took part in the summit in Frankfort.

### SUMMIT PHOTOS

Go to [www.courier-journal.com](http://www.courier-journal.com) to see a gallery of photos from the Frankfort event

hosts, also featured remarks by Gov. Steve Beshear and more than a dozen breakout sessions with ideas and examples of what some communities and schools have done to decrease their dropout rates and help children succeed in school.

According to state officials, more than 6,500 students dropped out of school in 2008. More than a quarter of all adults in Kentucky have less than a high school education.

"This is a statewide problem," Jane Beshear said. "And in order to solve this problem, it

will take a community effort."

The governor said the summit was "a call-out to communities across the state. It's a call to legislators, educators, business professionals, students, spiritual leaders, mental health workers.... Everyone has a role in this effort because everyone is somehow affected by it."

Saturday's meeting will be followed by six regional summits, beginning this fall in Bowling Green and continuing into next spring.

"Our goal is to use these summits to develop an action plan," the first lady said. "This is a real opportunity we have to be a leader."

Terry Holliday, Kentucky's new education commissioner, said he hopes the summits will "ignite a passion in every district, in every school and in every community."

One of the efforts highlighted Saturday was the Special Friends Mentoring Program, which began in 1996 at Second

See **DROPOUTS**, B5, col. 1

## DROPOUTS

Continued from B1

Street Elementary School in Frankfort.

Ronnie Dunn, who founded the program, told audience members how they can start a mentor program with minimal funds in their

community or school district.

"There are all kinds of storms that take hope away from kids," Dunn said. "Without hope, they can't be excited about their future."

Dunn said teachers have told her that they can identi-

## Summit targets problem

fy which students will drop out by the third or fourth grade.

"That is one reason why we have to get to them early," she said.

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